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Half of Michigan's young families struggle to make ends meet

Coordinated approach must address whole family to lift children from poverty

LANSING, Mich. – With half of Michigan's young children growing up in low-income households, state leaders must do more to lift kids out of poverty, including passing family-friendly work laws and offering better support for working parents with very low incomes.

A new Annie E. Casey Foundation report, *Creating Opportunity for Families: A Two-Generation Approach*, outlines common sense strategies to deliver high-quality early childhood education while helping parents with access to job training, career paths and other tools that will enable them to support their families.

"In Michigan and across the country, efforts focus on helping kids in poverty and other efforts help parents," said Kids Count in Michigan Project Director Jane Zehnder-Merrell. "This report calls for an approach that looks at the whole family. With so many struggling families in our state, it's important that we take action to help kids and their parents together."

In Michigan, 510,000 children ages birth to eight live in families earning less than 200 percent of poverty. That's less than roughly \$47,000 for a family of two parents and two children. Those children represent 49 percent of all kids 0-8.

The KIDS COUNT® policy report calls upon public, business and nonprofit leaders to work toward enacting policies that help kids while helping their parents get on career paths that will lead to family-supporting wages.

Michigan is on the right track with a P-20 educational data system that, when fully implemented, will be two-generational. It will track children's educational progress as well as that of their parents (if they are in school), and will enable cross-checking educational indicators with salaries, employment and public assistance. This will enable the state to determine how well educational and public assistance systems and programs are working.

Recommendations for Michigan's two-generation approach that will help end the cycle of poverty:

- **Expand the state Earned Income Tax Credit**, now at 6 percent of the federal tax credit. Research shows that boosting incomes of families with young children by just a few thousand dollars has long-lasting benefits for children.
- **Enact "Schedules that Work" legislation** that requires employers to give workers their schedules at least two weeks ahead of time. Michigan also lacks paid family and sick time laws, which are needed to protect low-wage workers who are least likely to have such benefits.
- **Restore financial aid to older adults to attend Michigan's public universities.** Cuts to higher education over the past decade have eliminated all public university and community college grants for older students, many of whom have families. In Michigan 79 percent of families earning low incomes and with children 8 or younger have no parent with more than a high school diploma.
- **Improve child care subsidies for working families with low incomes.** Michigan has among the lowest income eligibility in the country, at about 120 percent of the poverty level. A majority of states set the level at 150 percent of poverty or higher. The state must also ramp up the number of visits by licensing consultants. A recent federal audit found caseloads to be 150:1 – triple the recommended number.

The report emphasizes the need for federal and state agencies, along with businesses and community- and faith-based institutions, to work more closely together so that the whole family can succeed.

The full report, *Creating Opportunity for Families: A Two-Generation Approach*, will be available Nov. 12 at 12:01 a.m. EST at www.aecf.org.

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The Annie E. Casey Foundation creates a brighter future for the nation's children by developing solutions to strengthen families, build paths to economic opportunity and transform struggling communities into safer and healthier places to live, work and grow. For more information, visit www.aecf.org. KIDS COUNT® is a registered trademark of the Annie E. Casey Foundation.

The Michigan League for Public Policy, www.mlpp.org, is a nonpartisan policy institute focused on economic opportunity for all. It is the only state-level organization that addresses poverty in a comprehensive way.